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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

3 July 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 249

SUBJECT: Consequences of a UN Military Take-Over the South Korean Government

I. CONDITIONS INFLUENCING THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE UN ACTION

1. The manner in which a UN take-over of South Korea is accomplished will have a very important effect on the consequences of such UN action. If the UN take-over is accomplished peacefully and has the prior approval of key UN participating countries, prospects for obtaining domestic and international support for the UN move will be good. If the take-over is to be accomplished in such a manner, however, strict secrecy will have to be maintained until the very moment of UN action; any leak would provide the Rhee forces with an opportunity to mobilize its "people's representatives," Youth Corps elements, and strong-arm groups to demonstrate and perhaps physically interfere with the implementation of UN martial law.

2. The effectiveness of the UN justification accompanying and immediately following the take-over, will also be an important element conditioning domestic and international reaction to the UN move. The most effective explanations will be those emphasizing the necessity of protecting the security of UN forces in Korea and the decision of the UN to safeguard the constitution of a UN-created government.

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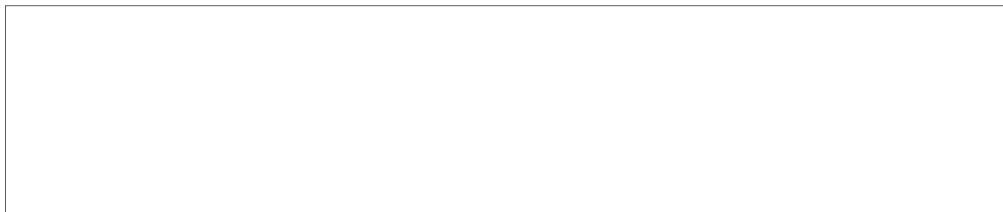
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3. The manner of implementation of the UN take-over will also have an important bearing on the consequences of the UN move. The following measures will probably be necessary if the take-over is to be successfully accomplished:

- (a) Use of both UN and ROK troops to enforce security and martial law.
- (b) The earliest possible restoration of democratic processes, in particularly providing the National Assembly freedom to meet without interference and releasing arrested Assemblymen.



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II. CONSEQUENCES IN SOUTH KOREA

4. Assembly actions during the spring of 1952 have demonstrated sufficient Rhee opposition to elect a new President. The current conflict has increased the hostility towards Rhee and there is little doubt that, once the UN showed its intention to protect the Assembly, Rhee would be voted out. The Assembly would probably proceed to elect a member of the present opposition as President. The Assembly's candidate might be Chang Myon (former Premier and Ambassador to the US), Chang Taek Song (present Premier) or Shin Ikhi (present chairman of the Assembly). The Assembly might also pass a constitutional amendment providing for a parliamentary form of government.

5. Factionalism on old and new issues would continue within the Assembly and the establishment of a parliamentary form of government

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might disturb continuity of administration. However, many of Korea's more able administrators would probably return to the government and the present corrupt clique headed by Yi Bum Suk and Louise Im would probably be replaced. On balance, the ROK Government's administrative efficiency would not deteriorate below its present level and might gradually improve.

6. Rhee elements would not succeed in rallying significant support against the take-over, and a new administration with interim UN support would be able to check countermoves by the Rhee forces.

- (a) Rhee's support in the Assembly largely results from intimidation. His organized popular following, which at times is made to appear formidable, is largely the product of his government powers. Although his name is well-known in the provinces, he can only elicit popular response so long as he maintains his present provincial officials and the national police. Without government support, the large pro-Rhee organizations appear to be too undisciplined and factional to serve as effective and reliable instruments for a Rhee countermove. Rhee's greatest effective strength comes from his control of the national police, the military police, military elements not under UN command, and various terrorist and "strong arm" groups.
- (b) The opposition has a majority in the Assembly, and many cabinet members probably are opposed to Rhee's recent actions. Rhee has alienated most of the professional, intellectual, student, business, and political groups outside his small clique of supporters. There have been several reliable indications that the three military chiefs of staff and their subordinate officers would support action to restore constitutional processes in the interests of maintaining the integrity of the armed forces. Thus, if the Assembly elected a new President, and UN forces supported his take-over,

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the Democratic Nationalist Party (the major political party now in opposition to the Rhee government) would retain control over the armed forces and would have little difficulty in reorientating the police and the provincial governments. Adverse popular reaction would be negligible and the government would have a broader base of support among the conservative factions which dominate South Korean political, economic, and intellectual life.

7. The ROK armed forces would cooperate in the UN action and their morale would be maintained, if not improved. There now exists strong sentiment against the Rhee clique among most military leaders (See Tab). In addition, there are indications that Rhee maneuvers, which tend to involve the Department of National Defense in politics, is having an adverse effect on the morale of ROK combat troops. Most ROK officers respect their US counter-parts and would probably support a UN move to restore constitutional government in Pusan.

III. INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS

A. Communist Bloc

8. We do not believe that the UN take-over of South Korea would result in significant Communist military reactions, unless, as seems unlikely, the ROK forces actively interfered with the imposition of UN martial law. In such an event, Communists would probably exploit this opportunity by taking the offensive.

9. The Communists would probably continue their stalling tactics in Panmunjom until the success or failure of the UN action became clear. If the UN initiative resulted in a weakened UN military and/or political position, Communist pressure would probably be exerted in an effort to gain an armistice on more favorable terms than the UN is presently offering.


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10. Communist propaganda would attempt to exploit Korean nationalism in an effort to turn South Korean popular sentiment against the UN. Communist propaganda would also attempt to exploit any differences which developed among UN members over the implementation of the UN take-over.

B. Non-Communist Areas

11. Except perhaps for Nationalist China, Rhee's regime has little prestige and support in the non-Communist world. If, therefore, a take-over were accomplished under optimum conditions of timing, concerted UN approval and participation, UN justification of the action taken, and successful follow-up (including the most respectful treatment of Rhee), non-Communist world reaction would probably be favorable. Reactions would probably be most favorable among the governments of Japan and Western Europe. Although there might be some tongue-in-cheek criticism of such "drastic" action, the UN action would probably also be supported by neutralist governments in Asia, and by neutralist parliamentary and popular opinion in Western Europe.

12. If the UN initiative were carried out under less than optimum conditions, reactions in Western Europe and Japan would probably still be largely favorable. Neutralist elements in Asia and Europe would probably be critical of such action, but this criticism would probably not be sufficient to affect adversely existing US relations with any states of the non-Communist world.


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TAB

BACKGROUND OF THE KOREAN CRISIS

1. On 25 May martial law was imposed in Pusan and other areas of the Republic of Korea. President Syngman Rhee has stated that the purpose of the martial law was to protect the government and UN forces from the threat of guerrilla activity (which has recently increased to some extent) and/or to protect the government from a huge "communist plot" centered in the National Assembly. In fact, however, the declaration of martial law was an outgrowth of several months of deteriorating relations between Rhee and the National Assembly as a consequence of the Assembly's refusing to pass Rhee-sponsored constitutional amendments which were designed to strengthen the Executive Branch at the expense of the Assembly. Presidential elections were scheduled for late June or early July and the most important of Rhee's amendments was one that would take the power to elect the President out of the Assembly (where Rhee opposition forces have become a majority) and replace it by popular election (in which Rhee's local political machines could deliver the election to him).

2. The imposition of martial law was quickly followed by the arrest and/or intimidation of opposition Assembly men with the object of preventing the Assembly from achieving a quorum. Later, Rhee, by pressure tactics, managed to obtain Assembly passage of an unconstitutional measure extending his tenure indefinitely. On the basis of claims of corruption and subversion in the Assembly (a claim denied by all UN and US officials in Korea) and of widespread popular demands (the US Embassy has reported that the so-called "will of the people" on this issue has been entirely manufactured by Home Minister Yi Bum Suk's political organizations), Rhee has declared that he will dissolve the Assembly. Although such a move would be entirely unconstitutional, although official protests from the US (including a personal letter from President Truman) and other UN nations have been made, and although efforts are still being made by the US Ambassador and the ROK Prime Minister to effect a compromise, Rhee appears to be determined to undertake this action regardless of the consequences. Tight censorship has been imposed in South Korea, but news of developments in Pusan has reached ROK military forces at the front. There are indications that morale among ROK officers, who are largely opposed to Rhee, has been adversely affected.

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